

## **What is polio?**

Polio is a disease that is caused by a virus that may affect the central nervous system. Since polio immunization has become widespread, cases of polio are very rare.

## **Who gets polio?**

Persons who do not receive the polio vaccine are most likely to get the disease. Polio is very rare in the United States, occurring mostly in persons who bring the disease in from another country. In very, very rare cases, oral polio vaccine can cause paralytic polio in a person who receives the vaccine or in a person who is a close contact of someone who received the vaccine.

## **How is polio spread?**

Polio is usually spread through the feces (stool). That is, an infected person may spread the virus to others by not washing his/her hands after using the bathroom.

## **What are the symptoms of polio?**

There is a wide range of disease. Some people do not have any symptoms. Others get a mild disease with fever, malaise, headache, nausea and vomiting. Some experience severe muscle pain and stiffness in the neck and back. In the most severe cases, paralysis and even death may occur.

## **How soon after infection do symptoms appear?**

The incubation period is usually 7 to 14 days for paralytic cases, with a range of 3 to 35 days.

## **When and for how long is a person able to spread polio?**

Patients are most infectious from 7 to 10 days before and after the onset of symptoms. However, patients are potentially contagious as long as the virus is present in the throat or feces. The virus persists in the throat for approximately one week after the onset of illness and is excreted in the feces for several weeks or, occasionally, months.

## **Does past infection with polio make a person immune?**

There are three types of polio virus. A person who has a certain type of polio will be immune from that type for life, but may still get polio from a different type of polio virus.

## **What is the treatment for polio?**

There is presently no cure for polio. Treatment involves supportive care to help relieve symptoms.

## **What are the complications associated with polio?**

Complications include paralysis, most commonly of the legs. Paralysis of the muscles needed for breathing and swallowing can be fatal.

**Is there a vaccine for polio?**

Two types of polio vaccine are available -- trivalent oral polio vaccine (OPV) and inactivated polio vaccine (IPV). Multiple doses are required for each type of vaccine. Sometimes a combination of both types is used. Your doctor or health department may give you more information about the different types of vaccine.

**How can polio be prevented?**

Maintaining high levels of polio immunization in the community is the single most effective preventive measure.

